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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000896

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SUBJECT: DFM SALTANOV ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS, NEW  
ISRAELI GOVERNMENT, AND SUDAN

Classified By: Ambassador John R Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. Ambassador Beyrle on April 8 conveyed to Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Saltanov and North Americas Department Director Igor Neverov Washington's preference not to link the proposed Moscow conference on the Middle East with President Obama's July visit to Russia. Saltanov in turn expressed a wish to consult with Special Envoy Mitchell next week, when both are planning to be in the Middle East region. Saltanov indicated that the GOR perceived mixed signals from the new Israeli government on the peace process, but had good discussions with President Abbas during his April 6-7 visit to Moscow. Commenting on the ICC decision to issue an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Bashir, Saltanov stated that Moscow was worried about the negative implications on the ongoing negotiations for a peaceful settlement and was generally supportive of a proposal to defer the warrant for a year. End Summary

2. (U) The Ambassador met with Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Saltanov on April 8 to exchange views on the new Israeli government, the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), and Sudan. The MFA's Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process Sergey Yakovlev joined the meeting.

Message on Timing of Middle East Conference Delivered  
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3. (C) Commenting on the GOR proposal to time the planned Moscow conference on the Middle East with President Obama's July visit to Russia, the Ambassador informed Saltanov that while the United States supported a well-planned conference that would move the MEPP forward, we preferred to focus the President's visit on the bilateral relationship. Saltanov and Yakovlev accepted the message calmly without pushback, as did Director of North Americas Department Igor Neverov when he ran into the Ambassador in the MFA lobby after the meeting. Neverov stated that while the suggestion from the Russian side was made in good faith, the U.S. preference not to link the two events was understandable.

Request to Consult with S/E Mitchell  
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4. (C) Commenting that a continued lack of progress in the MEPP did not benefit either side, Saltanov expressed a wish to consult closely with the U.S. on this issue. He conveyed that he is likely to be in Israel next week, around the time of Special Envoy Mitchell's travels in the region. Should their travel plans coincide, Saltanov would like to meet with S/E Mitchell and exchange views on the MEPP and the proposed Moscow conference on the Middle East.

Mixed Feelings about New Israeli Government  
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15. (C) Saltanov noted that the GOR was closely watching the formation of the new Israeli government and had mixed feelings about what it observed so far with regard to Netanyahu's MEPP policies. On the one hand, Netanyahu had expressed readiness to continue the dialogue with the Palestinians, but on the other hand had given indications that the process would be long and tough. Similarly, the new Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman had given contradictory signals, stating that he would dismantle his house in the West Bank for the sake of peace while issuing harsh comments about Israeli Arabs. In Saltanov's assessment, however, the presumed new National Security Advisor Uzi Arad was likely to play a more decisive role in Israeli MEPP policy formulation than Lieberman.

16. (C) Referring back to the planned Moscow conference on the Middle East, Saltanov told the Ambassador that the GOR was in consultations with people close to Netanyahu, and the Israelis "have not categorically said no" to participating in the conference. When asked about the Russian proposal for a ministerial-level Security Council session on the Middle East during Russia's SC presidency in May, Saltanov acknowledged that such an idea was being considered within the MFA, but that there was not yet a concrete conceptual plan nor would there be a direct linkage between the special session and the Moscow conference.

17. (C) Saltanov told the Ambassador that the GOR and the Palestinian Authority had a good conversation during President Abbas' April 6-7 visit to Moscow. Abbas indicated a readiness for dialogue with the new Israeli government that would be based on commonly accepted international legal

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norms, free from ideological bias and one-sided actions such as settlements on the West Bank. He also reportedly assessed President Obama's speech in Turkey in "extremely positive" terms. Referring to the Israeli settlements on the West Bank, Saltanov observed that this was the thorniest issue to the Palestinians, as should the process continue, there would be little of the Palestinian territory to speak of and thus no point to continuing discussions about a Palestinian state.

GOR Position on Bashir Unchanged

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18. (C) When asked about Russian views on the ICC decision to issue an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Bashir, Saltanov indicated that Moscow's position has remained the same, that the execution of the warrant would negatively affect the ongoing efforts to achieve a negotiated peace settlement in Sudan. Noting that Sudan was not a party to the Rome Statute and that Bashir was the head of a sovereign state, Saltanov expressed the GOR's discomfort with the ICC decision and made general noises supportive of ongoing consultations on a proposal by the African Union and the Arab League to defer the warrant for a year. Emphasizing the need for all parties to the conflict to commit to the UN peace process, Saltanov indicated that Moscow had made interventions to the Sudanese government on the expulsion of the 13 NGOs, was concerned about a potential humanitarian catastrophe, and was ready to extend assistance in this regard.  
BEYRLE